CHRONICLE AND COMMENT OF THE STAGE

Real Soldiers Don't Swank

Barrie Is Right to Exalt Reticence in "The New Word," for Speechmaking Is No Business for Officer or Doughboy

By Heywood Broun

British reticence, which Barrie exalts, even though he laughs at it in "The New Word," may not be the most admirable of virtues. It may not be a virtue at all, although we rather think it is, and yet it is the quality above all others which the writers of war plays should bear in mind.

It is possible that some of the spreadeagle plays about the war stimulate certain individuals. On the other hand, there can be no question that the plays in which American and British officers swank and utter heroic sentiments totally misrepresent the forces in the field. Reticence is not quite the word to describe the attitude of the American soldier in the field. He is not content merely to say nothing. So great is his fear that some one may suspect him of posing or of being conscious that he is "a maker of history" that the doughboy endeavors to prove his complete indifference to what is going on 'round about by trivial talk. The first words from the first American transport to dock in a port of France came from a doughboy who leaned over the rail and shouted to a little group of newspaper men, "Say, do they let the enlisted men drink in the saloons here?"

The soldier in question wasn't so much interested in the liquor problem as he was in letting every one within sound of his voice know that a little matter like coming to France was simply an everyday occurrence to him. The remark of an American artillery lieutenant months later showed a somewhat similar spirit. He was the commander of the battery which had fired the first shot at the Germans, and some newspaper men were asking him to describe the incident. "What did you say?" one of the correspondents asked.

"I gave 'em the range," answered the lieutenant, "and then I said 'Ready to fire?' and then 'Fire.'"

"Was that all there was to it?" asked the somewhat disappointed newspaper man.

"What would you expect me to do, make a speech?" replied the officer.

It may be that the public of the theatre expects the characters in khaki to make speeches. More possibly the author allows his characters to do so because that is an easy way to write a play. In the late "American Ace" the playwright tried to make every third line a bid for applause. During the early portions of the play he got much of this applause for which he tried, but later on folk just tired themselves out. And the value of the stage as a medium of patriotic propaganda will soon be entirely lost if playwrights do not refrain from hammering their points home so hard. American soldiers in France are neither sententious bores nor braggarts, and there isn't a reason in the world why they should be so represented on the stage.

The war propaganda of the screen is not always of the most stimulating sort, either. After viewing one popular film, we came away from the theatre with a confused idea that our chief grievance against Germany lay in the fact that the Kaiser had been rude to Mr. Gerard.

In direct ratio as the war comes nearer our plays become more frivolous. If a play is not about the war it must be about nothing. "Somewhere in France" or "Somewhere in April" are the only alternatives open to the playwright. Nobody cares now for any problem except that of the war. Only rarely does the author who turns his back upon the war succeed in turning out a first rate play. "Belinda," for instance, is rather amusing, but there is no getting away from the fact that mere lightness cannot make people forget the war. The more joyous the play the more will some be reminded that there is something around the corner. Perhaps the most courageous attitude for American playwrights to assume is to accept the fact that the war is the only subject in the world just now and strive to interpret it in varying moods. Probably nobody will deny that tragedy is the pervading mood of war, but there is comedy there as well, and even farce.

There is a third possibility which we forgot to mention. If there is any one among us who can look through the war and beyond it, he will not want for audiences.

But and Rebut

By Heywood Broun

From "Somewhere in the United States" comes the following letter from an American army officer concerning "Hearts of the World":

"Permit me to thank you for the few remarks you made in your column a few days ago regarding 'Hearts of the World.' Despite the cheap brand of publicity used in connection with this production—no doubt you recall the trash inserted in the dailies by Messrs. Comstock and Gest, in which they graciously tendered Mr. Griffith's condescending thanks to New York for thinking well of his supreme triumph and tearfully begged the public to call a policeman if a speculator dared to so much as look at them—despite this, I repeat, I bought a ticket (from the box office) and attended.

"Now, sir, I am an officer in the United States army, and I am fully cognizant of the fact that we are not going to lick the Germans by any pink tea methods, but at the same time I wish to raise my voice in protest against the unnecessarily revolting scenes that Mr. Griffith has allowed to mar his otherwise perfect example of cinematography. Pictures of that sort are the worst sort of thing for home morale—and that is just as important as front line morale. Can you imagine how the girls we leave behind are going to feel if some adverse fate leads them to the Forty-fourth Street Theatre?—are our mothers going to come away remembering the love scenes or the bit of film, no doubt referred to as 'zippy' by the producers, in which a bayonet is the means of causing a fountain of blood to spurt from a man's body? Concerning the German's frothing at the mouth, or his charmingly frank invitation to the girl to come and be seduced on the floor, your remarks were so much to the point that further comment is useless.

"I imagine that very nearly every soldier in and around New York has seen this film, and every one I have heard discuss it has made substantially the same comment—that it's a wonderful production, but that a wholesale cutting of the ghastly 'close-ups' would improve it and its reputation. Not that it affects the men in service, but we don't want our mothers, wives and sweethearts to be reminded that we may be going through just such scenes. They realize it enough as it is, God bless 'em."

Mr. Metcalfe, of "Life," thinks that we Americans are tolerant "in the matter of speech on our stage." He cites "A Doll's House," and writes: "It is difficult to picture a French audience approving a cast with the delivery, in the same play, of the French lines so remote from the French accent as the contrasting Bolshevik English of Mme. Nazimova and the British-English of Mr. Atwill are from purely spoken English, even from the not at all bad American-English of Messrs. Probert and Young."

Perhaps one of the reasons for our tolerance is the fact that our ears are not so accurately tuned as those of the French. Mr. Metcalfe, for instance, speaks of "the American-English" of Roland Young, in spite of the fact that Mr. Young is an Englishman with considerable training on the English stage and a marked English accent which has hardly been touched by some six years of playing in this country.

In a review of "A Marriage of Convenience" we suggested that a preliminary preparation of very good Burgundy might add to the spectator's enjoyment. Perhaps it might be well to consider beverages suitable for other performances. Milk, slightly warmed, should be appropriate for "The Little Teacher"; nothing heavier than whipped cream would do for "Belinda"; bromide to steady the nerves under bombardment is prescribed for "Hearts of the World," with a nut sundae for "The Army With Banners" and cyanide for "Salomé."

Virginia Fox Brooks Began Career With Sack and Black Wax

Virginia Fox Brooks, whose beautiful speaking voice and fine acting ability are now being seen in "Sinbad," began her career in an unusual way.

"On the 29th day of January, 1893—oh! but that's giving away a secret, isn't it? Well, in due time I started to grow up and was sent away to boarding school. There, one wonderful day, I played a witch in a school pantomime. I remember I wore a costume made out of a dirty potato sack, and that I put black sealing wax on my teeth—all but one. I was so artistic! I had to be taken to a dentist to have this sealing wax removed, and I remember that it was a painful operation. But it did not alter the resolution taken on that eventful occasion that I was going to be an actress—oh, a great actress. I think I was about twelve years old.

"A few years later I was sent to Paris. At first to school there, and then to live with Mme. Yvette Guilbert. I spent four wonderful years in her house in Paris. I studied languages and dancing and music and singing, the latter with Jacques Isnardop, of the Paris Conservatory. I shall never forget those four years with Mme. Yvette. If I do anything really fine, I feel that I shall owe it to her, to the privilege of daily association with so marvellous an artist, to all that I have learned through my intimate friendship with her.

"I came back to New York three years ago and my first season on the stage was with Leo Ditrichstein in 'The Great Lover.' Then came a short engagement with Sir Herbert Tree in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor.' Last winter I played with William Faversham in 'Getting Married.'"

New Plays This Week

MONDAY—At the Comedy Theatre, the Washington Square Players present "Close the Book," by Susan Glaspell; "The Rope," by Eugene O'Neill, to be played with "Lonesome Like" and "The Home of the Free."

Susan Glaspell and Eugene O'Neill will have plays on the new bill of the Washington Square Players which will open to-morrow night at the Comedy Theatre. Miss Glaspell, whose plays "Trifles" and "Suppressed Desires" have proved among the most popular in the repertory of the Players, has written in "Close the Book" a keen satire which is said to be double-edged in that it satirizes conventional people as well as those who pride themselves on being unconventional. The O'Neill play is a drama called "The Rope" and, like his great success "In The Zone," deals with simple, passionate people who live by the sea. In addition to these new plays "Lonesome Like," by Harold Brighouse, and "The Home of the Free" by Elmer Reizenstein, will be continued.

SCENE FROM "THE RAINBOW GIRL"

Beth Lydy and Harry Bertram at the New Amsterdam Theatre

Now on the Boards

Astor ..... "Fancy Free"
Belasco ....."Polly With a Past"
Bijou ....."A Pair of Petticoats"
Booth ....."Seventeen"
Broadhurst ....."Maytime"
Century Grove .....Midnight Revue
Geo. M. Cohan...."The Kiss Burglar"
Cohan & Harris ."A Tailor-Made Man"
Comedy ...Washington Square Players
Cort ....."Flo-Flo"
Eltinge ..."Business Before Pleasure"
Empire ..... "Belinda"
Forty-eighth Street,
"The Man Who Stayed at Home"
Forty-fourth Street Roof,
"Good-Bye, Bill"
Forty-Fourth Street,
"Hearts of the World" (Film)
Globe ....."Jack o' Lantern"
Greenwich Village Theatre,
Three One-Act Plays
Henry Miller,
"A Marriage of Convenience"
Hudson ....."Nancy Lee"
Lexington ..... "The Mystery of Life"
Liberty ....."Going Up"
Lyceum ....."Tiger Rose"
Maxine Elliott .."The Eyes of Youth"
Morosco ....."Lombardi, Ltd."
New Amsterdam .."The Rainbow Girl"
New Amsterdam Roof,
"The Midnight Frolic"
PPark ....."Seven Days Leave"
Playhouse ....."The Little Teacher"
Plymouth ..... "A Doll's House"
Princess ....."Oh, Lady! Lady!"
Republic ."Parlor, Bedroom and Bath"
Shubert ....."The Copperhead"
Thirty-ninth Street,
"A Cure for Curables"
Winter Garden ....."Sinbad"

In Vaudeville

PALACE — Spanish dancers from "The Land of Joy"; Josephine Victor, Elizabeth Brice, "Tom Walker in Dixie," Rockwell and Wood, William Ebs and Merian's Canines.

ALHAMBRA—Trixie Friganza, Willie Weston, "The Wild Guardians," Aveling and Lloyd, "Waiting for Her," Ford and Urma, Kaufman Brothers, Frank and Mike Hanlon and Richards.

COLONIAL—Nan Halperin, Clark and Hamilton, Ray Samuels, Arnaut Brothers, "Shoes," Seabury and Shaw, "Blue" Bert Kenney, Browne Sisters and Four Sensational Boises.

RIVERSIDE—Trixie Friganza, Gus Edwards' Song Revue, Olga Cook, Edna Aug, Aveling and Lloyd, "Behind the Front," Alton and Allen and Dupree and Dupree.

ROYAL—Grace La Rue, Jack Wilson, McKay and Ardine, a Charlie Chaplin photoplay, Ryan and Lee, "Waiting for Her," "The Lemon," Ed Morton and "Bits From Variety."

LOEW'S AMERICAN—"The Lieutenant and the Traffic Cop," Kuma Four, "Cloaks and Suits" and William Hart in "The Tiger Man."

In Brooklyn

BUSHWICK—Lillian Shaw, Conroy and Le Maire, a Charlie Chaplin photoplay, Imhop, Conn and Coreene, Venita Gould, "Our Family," "Just Fun," Donald E. Roberts and the La Vars.

ORPHEUM—Sophie Tucker, "Violinn," "The Human Machine Gun," Frank Westphal, Joseph L. Browning, "The Submarine Attack," "Mann off the Ice Wagon" and McIntosh and His Musical Maids.

The Red Apple of Merit

Uncle John Drew P erpetuates a Custom That Has Dated From the Youth of Lionel, John and Ethel Barrymore

By Solita Solano

John Drew walked back of the scenes of the Shubert Theatre the other evening and handed his nephew, Lionel Barrymore, a fat red apple.

Curiously enough, no diamonds from Kimberley, ivory from India or Bagdad wishing carpet could have given as much pleasure to the younger man as that simple and lusty fruit picked from a native orchard. It meant that the praise he had received from the critics was only his just due for an achievement of great worth.

The ceremony of the red apple is one that has persisted in the famous Drew-Barrymore family ever since Lionel, John and Ethel were youngsters. They always knew when they had done something worth while, because Uncle John never failed to translate merit into terms of red apples. And the family custom has not been allowed to perish.

Whether John received an apple for his Peter Ibbetson we do not know, but assuredly he should have. History at hand does not reveal what Mr. Drew brought behind the scenes, or even if he saw his nephews in that play. It is known, however, that two or three seasons ago, after watching John in his memorable performance of Galsworthy's "Justice," his uncle carried to the dressing room the largest apple Oregon had grown in six years. And privately we think John Barrymore should have had at least a bushel of them for his work in that play.

The evening Uncle John went to "The Copperhead" for the first time was the evening we, too, had selected to see Lionel in the rôle of Milt Shanks, living martyr. We were not a witness at the presentation of the apple, but we did see that when Uncle John left his seat to go behind the scenes his chest was ruining the fit of an exceedingly smart waistcoat.

Now, the original idea of getting this story was to watch the play at ease from an orchestra seat and then, according to established custom, to be conducted back stage with full honors by a manager wreathed in smiles, who would present one at the star's dressing room door for one of those "chatty" interludes productive of quotation marks and an invitation to luncheon.

This picture was all wrong, the manager said at once. Nothing like it had ever happened at the Shubert Theatre since Mr. Barrymore had been playing there. The star had a horror of newspapers. He was shy and restive. He did not like strangers. He was not as other actors. That he need never talk of himself nor his life had been a stipulation included in his contract, one gathered. We recalled that Uncle John himself does not like interviews. Nor dies Maude Adams, nor William Gillette. Nor Alla Nazimova—except on Wednesdays, when we have to be writing, not getting, them. And then there is Mrs. Fiske. See, talk and question if you will, but never wrap about her the quotation marks that commit her irrevocably.

"What is the theatrical profession coming to?" we reflected. "What if more stars should decide to go into seclusion?" And we began to think of Theda Bara, who may never drop her veil in public or even sip tea at the Ritz through its meshes, and Mme. Yorska, who is about to vamp it in the movies—is it for $5,000 a week?—if she but consents to go into an impenetrable seclusion throughout the process.

"Is the sanctity of the press nothing to Mr. Barrymore? Has he no duty toward those who admire him? Can he contemplate a possible vacant column on Sunday without remorse?" we inquired coldly. "Nothing. No. Yes," replied the harassed manager.

"Can you take a question to him and bring me back an answer? I'll have another ready for you on your return." "I'm afraid not," he answered, paling, and started away without warning.

By other and diverse means we were able to collect the following facts about Mr. Barrymore.

(a) He has unusual intelligence. (b) He lived in Paris ten years. (c) He admires sculpture. (d) He loves painting. (e) He adores music. (f) He is affectionate and playful. (g) He read books on Lincoln and Grant for atmospheric purposes while studying his present rôle.

No one who saw it has forgotten his performance of the sardonic, terrible old man in "Peter Ibbetson." Since he was a youngster Lionel Barrymore has had a predilection for characterization. When Ethel was sighing to play Juliet and John yearning for Romeo's doublet and hose, their brother was wringing his hands and crooking his back in an effort to simulate a squealing old miser.

LIONEL BARRYMORE

Star of "The Copperhead"

Now some people think that the delineation of character means donning a wig, hanging a beard over the ears and talking in an unnatural voice. It may be they are so often right as to have built up a very good case. Still, there remains the performance of Lionel Barrymore (and a finer piece of acting has seldom been seen on the American stage) to give pause to a public grown sadly indifferent to the beauties of acting, having passed them up for the subtleties of farce, the mental uplift of a chiffon chorus, the soulful lilt of a jazz band and the gay humor of the comedian who stops the show to recite the "hunk of tin" parody on "Gunga Din."

To see "The Copperhead" gives one a new grip on life and a completer understanding. Barrymore is a revelation of what an actor can do with his art when he has the wish, the brains and the talent. He mirrors the exaltation of Augustus Thomas's last act as perfectly as a quiet, open pool reflects the summer sun at midday. He causes the dead Lincoln to stand on the stage beside him, and it is he and not the actor who asks, "Milt, how much do you love your country?"

It will be many a month before another actor comes along who deserves an apple of the size and rotundity of the one Uncle John Drew presented to Nephew Lionel Barrymore the other evening. But what we want to know is did Niece Ethel receive one when she played "Camille"?